Sowing the right seeds

By Ana Maria Trujillo | The New Mexican

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Right now, it's just a dusty overflow parking lot across from the International Museum of Folk Art, but in time, it will be a parking lot for the Santa Fe Botanical Garden.

And the Santa Fe Botanical Garden will soon have an official garden.

"This is our future parking lot when we have a botanical garden here," said Fran Cole, the outreach director for the organization with excitement in her voice as she stood on a hot August day in the overflow parking lot.

Ground will break late this year or early in 2011 on the new garden, which will be built in four phases.

Until then, the nonprofit organization, which was founded in 1987, will hold some of its events — such as its upcoming annual plant sale — at the overflow lot, which is now known as The Santa Fe Botanical Garden at Museum Hill.

Plants for education

Although there is no buildings built yet, several tents will be pitched at The Santa Fe Botanical Garden at Museum Hill the first weekend in September for one of the organization's biggest fundraisers — the annual plant sale.

Cole said the organization wanted to start moving some of their events to the new space on Museum Hill to let people know there will be a new garden soon.

"We've always had our plant sale indoors at another site," Cole explained. "We decided to bring it to the new site to start really getting the word out."

The plant sale has been raising money to fund the Garden's educational programs at both the Leonora Curtin Wetland and the Ortiz Mountains Educational Preserves, and will continue to do that this year.

Many things draw people to the annual event.

"It's our opportunity to introduce plants that are really great for growing in Santa Fe," Milbourn said. "It's as much an educational event as it is a sale."
From 1 to 6 p.m. Sept. 3, there will be a members-only preview of the sale, but anybody can come and become a member to get in. A free plant will be given to the first 25 new members.

The regular plant sale will be from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sept. 4.

A place to call home

Having an official garden for the Santa Fe Botanical Garden is a dream come true for member Janice Tucker.

"I think it's a wonderful thing," Tucker said happily. She's been a member since 1999 and has been working toward this goal since soon after joining. She was on the board of directors when the organization secured a the lease on the land four years ago.

"We had the idea (for the garden) even before we got the city (land). We looked at several other sites and this turned out to be ideal," Tucker said. "The location is good — it's right across from the museum and it's a good partnership. We'll help them and they'll help us."

"It's adjacent to so many other cultural attractions," Cole said.

It may be hard to see from the parking lot, but the city of Santa Fe land where the new garden will be planted has is along the Arroyo de Los Pinos; Cole said the garden will span both sides of the arroyo when it is planted. The water-wise garden was designed by landscape architect W. Gary Smith.

"The land is very interesting and it has a very natural landscape that sort of embodies Santa Fe and it's got these strong features," Milbourn said. "We loved the property and we loved its proximity to the museums."

She noted botanical gardens in other cities are usually close to museums. "It's a perfect pairing," she added.

Milbourn said funds are nearly secured for the first phase (which will cost $1.2 million), which will be called The Orchard Gardens.

"(The Orchard Gardens) is a series of different features and destinations — the most notable is a fruit-tree orchard," Milbourn said. "The main path will take people all the way through The Orchard Gardens and into what will be the rest of the garden."

Milbourn noted that along the trail there will be different features such as a welcome ramada (which will have maps and information), a meadow garden and the orchard.

"It's going to be a beautiful garden in its own right," Milbourn said.

Phase two will be called The Naturalistic Gardens, which will feature native grasses, shrubs, trees, an outdoor classroom and a bridge built in the 1930s that the Botanical Garden is in the process of acquiring.

Phase three will be The Courtyard Gardens, a sequence of five courtyards that will each have a different theme. The last phase is called The Arroyo Trails, which will be walking and bike trails with natural landscape.

The organization is hoping all four phases can be done in four years, but "How we proceed is completely dependent on raising the funds to move forward," Cole said.

"The garden will have some very natural areas but it's also going to be a great demonstration to others
because they're not putting any (plants) that don't do well here in Santa Fe," Tucker said. "Botanical gardens are wonderful. I think it's going to be a big draw for our town."

**Joining the family**

Tucker had lived in humid climates all her life, first in the Deep South and later on the West Coast. When she moved to Santa Fe in the late 1990s, she hadn't a clue what kind of plants belonged here.

"I joined the Garden just so I could learn more about the plant life here," Tucker said. She gathered all the information she needed for a successful Santa Fe garden and soon she was hooked. "I started helping with the garden tours and that evolved over to the educational part."

She became a docent at the Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve and started doing some photography for the organization. Later she held a spot on the board of directors.

"(Members) are giving back to their community," Tucker said. "I just would encourage people to become members. I think that things that are happening right now are exciting and I believe that they'll want to be a part of something really great. We're not just about growing plants, we're about the environment."

Nothing would be possible if it weren't for the members and volunteers of the organization, Milbourn said.

**Lifelong learning**

The Garden was founded for environmental education and community outreach. It offers several programs for children at its two nature preserves, including the free third-grade school program that starts in September.

"It's a great program," Tucker said, noting that it meets the state science standards for education. "It costs (kids) nothing to come to the Preserve, which I think is a plus because the schools have had to cut back on budgets."

There is even learning opportunities for adults, although sometimes those aren't free. One such event is the upcoming Meadows, Wildflowers and Grasses Conference — sponsored by the Garden, Native Plant Society of New Mexico and the Santa Fe Master Garden Association, which will be on Oct. 2 at IAIA and will feature various speakers.

For more information on any of the Garden's educational programs, or to become a member, visit [www.santafebotanicalgarden.org](http://www.santafebotanicalgarden.org), or call 471-9103.

"We're an ecological organization," Tucker said. "I think it's great that you can be educated whether you're a kid or whether you're an adult."

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